

critical digest

Vol. II No. 37

July 3, 1950

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

Daily Reviewers Rate the New Revue

Peep Show-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Three sharp "cons", one "so-so", six "pro" reviews and a list of suggestions from License Commissioner McCaffrey were the items found in Mike Todd's file box. Sex, nudity and torso twirling, insist critics of Time Herald Tribune and Women's Wear, are no substitutes for originality, wit and humor. Chapman, News, enjoyed parts of huge spectacle, but he is convinced that Producer Todd doesn't like dames or women's clothes. He admitted he felt ill at ease because he was with a woman. Remainder of critics loved the beautiful girls, their slight costumes designed by Irene Shariff, the monster sets by Howard Bay and the long list of burlesque comedians --- in that order. Juggling teams, Teiro Brothers walked off with most of the raves, while "Peanuts" Mann was billed as top comic. "Stay with the Happy People" by Jule Styne as sung by Lina Romay was judged top song. Lilly Christine was applauded by most in the "Cat-Girl" number, the item which the License Commissioner wants toned down. While the King of Siam was urged not to quit his throne to become a song smith. Sharpest comment came from Broadway columnist, Denton Walker: "All you need to enjoy it is a strong stomach and a weak mind." Several commented on weak comedy material, but most have other things in their eyes and on their minds.

Trade Critics View Second Arena Revival

Francis, Billboard, and Bron, Variety, both okayed Heilwell-Thomas theatre-in-the-round production of Julius Caesar, the run of which has been extended another week at the Hotel Edison. Billboard critic still isn't convinced that the ballroom locale is conducive to complete enjoyment of the drama, but he admits that the cast gave a worthy production of the Bard's drama. Dan Levin was praised for doing wonders in legitimate staging. Variety critic set no limitations on his enthusiasms, every one came in for praise.

Summer Theatre Tryout

Angel in the Pawnshop, A.B. Shiffrin's new play which the Theatre Guild may produce in the fall, made its strawhat debut at the Guild's Westport Country Playhouse. Eddie Dowling stars as the former song and dance man turned pawnbroker, with Joan McCracken as the dancing match girl. Doul, Variety, noted that while Dowling felt right at home in his kind of part, the critic felt that the drama, which he termed a "wordy whimsey" never took on the dimensions of a good play.

Broadway Hits Revisited

Ray Middleton is just as good as Eric Pinza in the lead of South Pacific, Chapman, News, tells all who ask the inevitable question. And in his own way Middleton is better. Mary Martin is better than ever, while the supporting cast remains in peak form. Margaret Phillips dominates the new lineup in The Cocktail Party, comments Sheaffer, Eagle, agreeing with other critics who revisited the Eliot hit...A third viewing of Texas Id'l Darlin' by Francis, Billboard, finds him still dissatisfied with the goings on. But he must admit it is a better and faster show than when it first opened.

Shows That Closed

Lost in the Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49-7/1/50. Maxwell Anderson musical version of Alan Paton's "Cry the Beloved Country" drew mixed notices. Fourteen critics voted "pro" of the 30 rated. Dissenters felt that much good material was wasted. Watts, Post summed up viewpoint with "nothing was lacking save a little inspiration."

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' The Green Room Department '
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FACTS OF LIFE...General public often gets a completely cockeyed idea of life in and around the stage because numerous writers are careless, complains Burr, Playbill. They feel that when they write about the stage any monstrosity born of ignorance will be accepted as fact. Errors can be avoided by research.

"BILLBOARD" STARS...Shirley Booth and Lilli Palmer were chosen by editors of trade magazine as the two legitimate stars who have broadened their name appeal to new fields this season.

CRITICS NEXT SEASON...His colleagues are so predictable, George Jean Nathan gives his readers a preview of what the critics will write about next season...Reviewers will praise top actresses in bad plays...Lady Is For Burning will be billed as "precious", and not as good as The Cocktail Party...Critics will once again be accused of being bribed for writing good reviews for bad plays. But the charge, says Nathan, is silly because producers aren't dumb enough to pay for something they get for nothing.

SEVENTH PLACE...Theatre is the seventh prime necessity for our standard of living, Bernard Baruch wrote in a letter to producer John Golden, which Variety reprinted. Food, clothing, housing were the first three.

MAY CAESAR...Garland, Journal-American, expressed surprise on WNBC Critic's Corner that Barnes, Herald Tribune, should have decided that Julius Caesar was a bad play. Garland thought that critics for 300 years had considered this one of the great psychological melodramas, and that it was the production, not the play, that was up for criticism...Sobel, Journal-American, meanwhile termed the Bard's drama a good clean show, with no sex.

BETTER THEATRES...N.Y.C.Council was urged to settle their differences and pass a revised theatre building code law by the New York Herald Tribune which ran an editorial on the subject. Amendments are now held up in committee due to controversy between various safety experts on elements of the laws.

ATTACKING THE CRITICS...Drama field should watch with interest the recent panning of movie critic by a trailer. "Cheaper by the Dozen" trailer shown at Wilby-Kincy movie houses reprinted the blast by Time movie critic against the picture. Trailer then commented "We bring this to your attention in order to prove that you cannot rely on the taste and judgement of smart-alecky critics who try to choose your motion picture entertainment."

PRESCRIBED DRAMA...Several N.Y. psychoanalysts are prescribing visits to The Member of the Wedding and The Cocktail Party as parts of their cures, discovered Wahls News. Proving that you are wrong if you think every one goes to the theatre to be amused, having a good cry or because he's celebrating a wedding anniversary or a tax refund.

CHECKING THE CRITICS...Arena Theatre's display ad for Julius Caesar has a beaut. Besides misquoting Atkinson, Times, and Watts, Post, who filed "con" and "so-so" votes, the ad features a quote from Hawkins, WT&S. His criticism of the production has not been printed due to the three week old strike of his paper.

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' Random Notes '
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Theatre Scrapbook, Box 562, Armonk, New York offers reprints of publicity pictures, stories, reviews from Born Yesterday for 25 cents...Esso Oil Company will sponsor "Theatre Fair", tent show adjunct of Virginia's Barter Theatre. Tour opens in upper New York State.

' Summer Theatres & Off Broadway '

Interplayers revival of 18th century John Gay The Beggar's Opera, now shown at the air-cooled Carnegie Recital Hall was applauded by Pollock, Compass, who thought the company played it with a refreshing gusto. Watts, Post, enjoyed the production, but thought it was slightly less than brilliant...Players Club production of Pirandello's Right You Are (If You Think You Are) continues to be greeted with raves. Atkinson, Times, and McDonald, Billboard, join in praising the top flight production by Yale and Columbia drama graduates. Atkinson singled out Thomas Hill, Virginia Payne and Boris Segal as young hopefuls worth watching.

Chapman, News, and Coleman, Mirror, journeyed to Danbury, Connecticut to view Ben Boyar's Music Circus production of The Merry Widow. Both enjoyed the performance, the cool country air and the fine food available at nearby inns...Margaret Webster's production of The Taming of the Shrew, which is advertised as the "original Kiss Me, Kate" opened the season at the Berkshire Playhouse, Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Russ, Variety, enjoyed the brisk performance by the talented ensemble...Non-theatrical activities covered by the drama critics this week included Cole Brothers Circus at Yankee Stadium, which was praised by Rice, Post and Coleman, Mirror, and Elliot Murphey's new Aquashow at Flushing Meadows Amphitheatre, which was enjoyed by Rice, Coleman and Sheaffer, Eagle.

' Interview Round Up '

BEN BOYAR...Producer of Danbury, Connecticut Music Circus is presenting "theatre-in-the-round" musicals by instinct. He has never seen an arena type production, he admitted to Pollock, Compass. But he is now in business in his new tent near the famous hat city.

WILLIAM ROSENBLUM...New York rabbi of Temple Israel will have his first play, Chaplain John, produced by Irving Strouse in the fall. Sheaffer, Eagle, discovered that the playwright preacher was also a lawyer, a social worker and a publicist during his career. Play is based on true story of a Protestant chaplain.

ALBERT DEKKER...Death of a Salesman lead player chatted with WPIX Danton Walker as he applied his make-up for the Willy Loman role. In spite of what most movie actors think of the stage, he doesn't find his theatre role gruelling at all. Arthur Miller has discussed the role with him many times, and approves of his portrayal.

MERVYN NELSON...Director of Tickets Please acts as spy now that Hartman musical is a hit, he revealed to MBS Sardis. Because the director is paid a percentage after his original fee, it is his job to make sure everyone is keeping up to form. Nelson, who is also a TV director, has found that stage actors work the best in the new medium.

HERMAN LEVIN...Co-producer of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes detailed his enviable occupational disease to Coleman, Mirror. He has a sore right arm signing profit checks for investors. Future plans for Levin-Smith call for Sean O'Casey's Cock-a-Doodle Dandy and an Auerback-Rome revue, Bless You All.

' News and Notes '

Scheduled theatre probe by House Judiciary Committee may be postponed due to crowded hearing calendar...Ambassador Theatre returns to fold as legitimate house. Was used for five years for movies...Show of the Month is sponsoring "Summer Show Bus" to Lambertville, N.J. Music Circus. Also selling "Ticket Speedo-Grams" to aid in ordering mail order seats...Paul Green's third symphonic drama will open August 4th at Rock Cree Park, Washington, D. C.; Lost Colony at Manteo, N.C. and Common Glory at Williamsburg, Va., both opened July 1st.

' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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| 1. NY Times | 11. Newark News | 21. Catholic World |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Women's Wear Daily | 22. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 13. Daily Worker | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. Wall Street Journal | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass (PM, Star) | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. George Jean Nathan | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. NY Sun (Morehouse) | 17. Morning Telegraph | 27. Time |
| 8. NY Journal American | 18. Variety | 28. Nation |
| 9. NY World Telegram and Sun | 19. Billboard | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Theatre Arts | 30. New Yorker |

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 2-9-14-22-25-29.
So-So: 16-30. None: 13-21.

Come Back, Little Sheba-Booth, 2/15/50. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 2-4-7-12-27.
So-So: 3-6-30. None: 13-15-21-24-25-28.

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 22. So-So: 6-29. None: 21.

Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. So-So: 27. None: 5

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 5-10-11-13-16-23-25-28-29.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-21-28.
So-So: 16-19-22-23-27.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-6-7-20-26-27-28-30.
None: 13-21.

Kiss Me, Kate-Century-12-31-48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.

Lost in the Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 14 votes. Con: 8-9-13-20-21-22-24-25-28-29-30. So-So: 4-27. None: 16.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 25 votes. Con: 16.
So-So: 2-27-30. None: 21.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17.
None: 28.

Peter Pan-Imperial, 4/24/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 8-16-30. So-So: 6-14-19.
None: 13-20-21-28.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 27. So-So: 23.
None: 5-10-11-13-14-16-22-28-29.

Texas Li'l Darlin'-Hellinger, 11/25/49. Pro: 12 votes. Con: 1-4-7-8-18-19-23-29-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-20-26-27. None: 25-28.

Where's Charley?-St. James, 10/11/48. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27. None: 10-28.

The Wisteria Trees-Martin Beck, 3/29/50. Pro: 14 votes. Con: 2-7-9-10-16-22-23-25-26-27-28-30. So-So: 18-29. None: 13-21.

Tickets Please!-Coronet, 4/27/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 11-16-29-30. So-So: 26.

